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DE RUEHAK #0917/01 1081415
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 181415Z APR 07
FM AMEMBASSY ANKARA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1784
RUEKJCS/CJCS WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHDC//PA
RUEUITH/ODC ANKARA TU
INFO RUEHTH/AMEMBASSY ATHENS 7994
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 2543
RUEHDA/AMCONSUL ADANA 1870
RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS 5865
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
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RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2239
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 000917

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DEPARTMENT FOR INR/R/MR, EUR/SE, EUR/PD, NEA/PD, DRL
JCS PASS J-5/CDR S. WRIGHT

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: OPRC KMDR TU

SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
WEDNESDAY, APRIL 18, 2007

In Today's Papers

Presidential Debates Continue

All papers report Prime Minister Erdogan met with opposition leaders Mehmet Agar of DYP and Erkan Mumcu of Anavatan to discuss the process of presidential elections in the parliament. Agar told reporters after the meeting that he did not see Erdogan as fully determined to run for president. Mumcu said after meeting Erdogan that he saw the PM "desirous but undecided" to run for the post. Agar and Mumcu both said they suggested Erdogan meet with the main opposition CHP leader Deniz Baykal as well, but Erdogan reportedly said he won't.

Meanwhile, Baykal told his party group meeting, "Now, besides the government, the presidential powers will be assumed by a mentality which challenges the constitution. This will have grave consequences." "Erdogan cannot ignore one million people rallying against his candidacy. His presidency will do the country, nation and the state no good," stressed Baykal.

On Wednesday, Erdogan will attend an AKP executive board meeting to discuss the presidential elections, but he may not name a candidate until next week.

DYP-Anavatan to Unite

Liberal Radikal and mainstream Vatan report opposition leaders Mehmet Agar of DYP and Erkan Mumcu of Anavatan have confirmed moves to unify their two parties before parliamentary elections later this year. The two parties will also cooperate in the presidential elections. Vatan says the parties will merge in late April, and Agar and Mumcu will hold a rally in Bursa. Radikal claims Anavatan party candidates will participate in the general elections on the DYP card, and after the elections, the two parties will merge under a new name.

Turkey Unveils EU Roadmap

All papers report Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul and chief EU

negotiator Ali Babacan made public at a press conference Turkey's "seven-year roadmap to the EU," Turkey's Harmonization Program to EU Acquis. Gul underlined Turkey's commitment of full membership to EU, adding the program includes the reform of over 200 laws and 600 regulations, including the controversial Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code. Babacan said the roadmap was created based on the needs in Turkey, and not according to the demands of the EU. Babacan noted about one-third of the Turkish Constitution has been amended so far.

Mottaki Pays 'Surprise' Visit to Ankara

All papers report Iranian Foreign Minister Manoucher Mottaki paid a "surprise visit" to Ankara yesterday. The visit's aim was to discuss Iran's participation in the upcoming Iraq neighbors meeting in Egypt, to try to seek Turkey's help in releasing the five Iranian diplomats detained by Americans in Erbil in January, and to discuss Iran's nuclear program. Mainstream Sabah reports Mottaki told Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul that Iran was reluctant to participate in the next Iraq's neighbors meeting since the US and G-8 will be attending as well. "We would have participated in the meeting if it was held in Istanbul, but we don't want to be at the same table with countries whose approach toward us is obvious," said Mottaki. Gul expressed dissatisfaction that the meeting will not be in Istanbul, but added Turkey will join the conference in Egypt. The FM urged Mottaki that Iran should participate as well. Sources told Zaman Iran will not participate in the May 4 gathering in Egypt unless the US releases the five diplomats captured in Erbil.

Buyukanit Visits Thessalonica

All papers report the Turkish Chief of the General Staff (TGS) General Yasar Buyukanit, in Thessalonica to participate in the first regional conference of Balkan countries, said he wants a favorable atmosphere for the settlement of disputes between Turkey and Greece.

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"Turkey and Greece are not enemies," Buyukanit said, noting the Turkish side was ready to start unarmed military flights over the Aegean, urging Greece to do the same.

Editorial Commentary on Iraq

Hikmet Bila comments in the nationalist-leftist daily Cumhuriyet: "The main concerns of Turkey stem from the current phase of Turkish-American relations. Turkey certainly has no problem with the American people. But the American people are being held hostage by the current US administration which continues to mess up everything in the world. The 60-year old Turkish-American alliance has also been messed up by Washington. Turkey has been a staunch supporter of the US, from both the civilian and the military perspectives, but it turned anti-American in a few years time. The reasons for this should be searched for in Washington, not in Ankara. The Middle East policy of the Bush administration is nothing but an elephant in a glass house. Whether Turkey actually goes for a cross-border operation in Northern Iraq remains to be seen. Yet something can be said even today: Turkish-American relations are doomed to experience problems as long as the Bush administration remains in power and maintains its current policy in the Middle East, including in Iraq."

Cuneyt Ulsever writes in the mainstream daily Hurriyet: "Even though Turkey is very focused on domestic politics, the Northern Iraq issue remains crucially important for us. Had Turkey passed the March 1 parliamentary motion [to allow US troops to access Iraq via Turkey], we would have a different and more positive picture for Turkey and Iraq. Given the current situation, it is too late for Turkey to intervene in Northern Iraq. On the contrary we should work on finding ways to establish a close link with the structure in Northern Iraq. The US is very confused in Iraq. Washington can be influenced to Turkey's favor if Ankara displays a determined stance.

Turkey should also think about pursuing a carrot and stick policy regarding Northern Iraq, with the military representing the stick while the MFA offers the carrot. One of the things that Turkey is concerned about is the upcoming referendum in Kirkuk. Turkey should give a kind of ultimatum to Northern Iraq and insist on the postponement of the referendum. If the Northern Iraqi administration shows its good will by asking to postpone the Kirkuk referendum, this will be the beginning of a new era between Turkey

and the Northern Iraqi administration, one in which both sides will begin to understand each other well."

TV Highlights
NTV (6 A.M.)

Domestic News

- Labor union DISK has disclosed plans to hold a mass demonstration in Taksim Square in Istanbul on May 1. Istanbul governor's office said demonstrations will not be allowed in Taksim.

- Arzuhan Yalcindag, chair of the influential Turkish business group TUSIAD, said she does not expect Prime Minister Erdogan to run for president.

- Murat Ozturk, the head of Kurdish party DTP branch in Agri, has been arrested for making terror propaganda during Nevruz celebrations in late March.

- On Thursday Turkey, Iraq and the UNHCR will hold a meeting in Geneva to discuss the closure of Makhmour Camp in northern Iraq.

International News

- Armenian Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian said Azerbaijan and Armenia were very close to a deal on Nagorno Karabakh.

- Police announced that the gunman who killed 33 people at Virginia

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Tech University has been identified as a 23-year-old South Korean.

- At a two-day conference in Switzerland hosted by UNHCR, diplomats from over 60 nations are considering how to tackle the problem of around 4 million Iraqi refugees.

- Britain's International Development Secretary Hilary Benn said the British government has dropped the term "war on terror" to refer to the struggle against political and religious violence.

WILSON